

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 520

CS 510 432

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TITLE The Prophet of Revealed Knowledge: Richard Brother, the Prince of the Hebrews and Nephew of the Almighty.
PUB DATE 2000-11-09
NOTE 34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (86th, Seattle, WA, November 9-12, 2000).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Response; Case Studies; *Clergy; *Leaders; *Persuasive Discourse; *Religion; Rhetorical Criticism
IDENTIFIERS Apocalypticism; Charisma; Eighteenth Century; Message Transmission; *Rhetorical Strategies; Textual Analysis

ABSTRACT

Seeking the answers as to what makes one speaker more charismatic than another and why some speeches are merely effective while others move audiences to a transcendent state is a difficult task. This paper follows up on this challenge and seeks to provide some answers as to how the prophetic works of Richard Brothers moved his followers to a fervent state. The paper provides a brief description of the prophetic career of Brothers (b.1757) in 18th-century London; a summary of the literature on charisma (considered the result of a complex interaction among situation, personality, message, and audience); an analysis of Richard Brothers' charisma as a prophet, focusing on his apocalyptic writings; and observations concerning the dynamics of charisma as a rhetorical construct. Contains 165 notes. (NKA)

**The Prophet of Revealed Knowledge:
Richard Brother, the Prince of the Hebrews and Nephew of the Almighty**

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**A Paper Presented at the Eighty-sixth Annual Meeting of the National
Communication Association, 9 November 2000, Seattle, Washington**

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**The Prophet of Revealed Knowledge:
Richard Brothers, the Prince of the Hebrews and Nephew of the Almighty**

After this I was in a vision, having the Angel of God near me, and saw Satan walking leisurely into London: his face had a smile, but under it his looks were sly, crafty, and deceitful.

After this I was in a Vision and saw a LARGE RIVER run through London COLOURED WITH HUMAN BLOOD!¹

With these words, the millenarian prophet named Richard Brothers warned the inhabitants of London of the impending apocalypse which would soon overtake the world. Although it is tempting to dismiss Brothers' rhetoric as the rantings of a lunatic, he stands out a charismatic figure who commanded the attention of many followers in Britain during the 1790s.

Smith poses two seminal questions for the student of rhetoric: "What makes one speaker more charismatic than another? Why are some speeches merely effective, while others move audiences to a transcendent state? Seeking the answers to these questions is a difficult task but answer them we must if we are to defend rhetoric as a unique art form."² This essay follows up on Smith's challenge and seeks to provide some answers to how the prophetic works of Richard Brothers moved his followers to a such fervent state. In an attempt to provide these answers, this inquiry provides a brief description of the prophetic career of Brothers, a summary of the literature on charisma, an analysis of the Brothers' charisma as a prophet, and observations concerning the dynamics of charisma as a rhetorical construct.

Richard Brothers, The Prince of the Hebrews

Richard Brothers was born in Placentia, Newfoundland, in 1757, on 25 December, Christmas Day--an auspicious sign, he surmised later, of his divine destiny as a prophet. His father, who was a gunner for the local army outpost,

sent Richard to England to join the navy when he was just a boy. In 1771, at the age of fourteen, Richard went to sea as a midshipman. Eleven years later, he was promoted to lieutenant, but retired on half-pay one year later. During the next six years, the period which was critical for his transformation from a lowly naval officer to a prophet, the record of his life is speculative at best. He may have traveled to France, Italy, and Spain while serving in the mercantile marines. In 1786, he married Elizabeth Hassall at Wrenbury, but immediately after the ceremony he returned to his ship. When Brothers came home a few years later, he discovered that his wife had started a family with another man. Despondent after finding out about his wife's infidelity, he moved to London, started to study the Bible, and immersed himself in mystical and prophetic literature.³

In 1790, "the year" that "the Spirit of God began first (although I always had a presentiment of being some time or other very great) to enlighten my understanding, and teach me to distinguish right from wrong,"⁴ Brothers embraced the Quaker doctrines against bearing arms and taking oaths. The latter qualm caused a real hardship for Brothers because he refused to swear an oath required for receiving his half-pay from the Admiralty. When the Admiralty suspended his pension, he soon fell into the debt. His landlady, Mrs. Green, notified the local guardians of the poor. After questioning him, the guardians placed Brothers in a workhouse for six months. During this period, they arranged to draw his pension for him to pay off his debts.⁵

Prior to being placed in the workhouse, it appears that Brothers began to struggle with the possibility that the Almighty was speaking to him. In a pamphlet later written by Mrs. Green as a testimony to her belief in Brothers' divine mission, she wrote of his odd behaviors when he lived in her home. He broke his sword, vowing that he would never use it again. After having a vision of London's destruction, he laid on his face for three days and refused to eat.⁶

Other testimony about Brothers' peculiar behavior came from Joseph Moser, a board member of the workhouse when Brothers lived there in 1791.

Moser's reminiscences date from 1795, when Brothers "was one of the most widely discussed individuals in England."⁷ In his pamphlet, Moser recalled that Brothers exhibited "a very methodical kind of madness," manifesting itself in outbursts about religious matters and "ever in expectation: sometimes of a lady, who was to descend from the clouds, sometimes of immense sums of money, which were . . . to be showered upon him--sometimes of a period like that foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, when turbulence & war should cease, and peace, love, and happiness, be extended to all mankind.'"⁸

Brothers himself reflected on this period of his life three years later. In A Revealed Knowledge and Prophecies of the Times, he wrote about a "very LOUD AND UNUSUAL KIND OF THUNDER that [he] heard in the beginning of January 1791."⁹ He believed the thundering was "the voice of the ANGEL mentioned in the Eighteenth Chapter of the Revelation, proclaiming the Judgment of God and the fall of Babylon the great. . . . Every time the angel spoke, it roared through the streets, and made a noise over London like the falling of mountains of stones."¹⁰

While living in the workhouse, Brothers started having visions which he regarded as divine revelations.¹¹ One vision was particularly disturbing: Satan was "walking leisurely into London: his face had a smile, but under it his looks were sly, crafty, and deceitful."¹² In another frightening vision, he "saw London a scene of confusion," "a LARGE RIVER [ran] through London COLOURED WITH HUMAN BLOOD!"¹³

After leaving the workhouse in February 1792, Brothers rented a room in a boarding house on Compton Street in Soho. At this point, he became a healer, thinking he could restore the sight of the blind. Brothers also became very obsessed with politics.¹⁴ He sent letters to the king, the queen, the prime minister, and other officials, warning them that "the revolution in France . . . proceeded entirely from the judgment of God to fulfil the prophecy of Daniel: therefore all attempts . . . and preserve the monarchy by force was opposing what was determined in the Scripture of Truth."¹⁵ On 17 May 1792, he went to "the Parliament-house" to "inform [the Commons] of their own sudden

fall in the jaws of the earth by a pre-determined earthquake" if they persisted in the policy of opposing the revolution in France.¹⁶ When told to leave the area, "the Lord God spoke to [him] . . . and said--Get away, get away from this place; be under no concern, it was not you that was despised and ordered away, but me, in your person, that sent you."¹⁷

After this ill-fated experience, Brothers continued having visions.¹⁸ In the meantime, he refused to take the oath for drawing his pension and once again fell into debt. This time the authorities placed him in Newgate, one of England's most notorious prisons. He found himself confined in a dimly lit cell with no beds and fourteen other inmates. Eight weeks later, he signed a power of attorney, allowing him to draw his pension and pay off his debts. As he signed the document, he inked out a phrase referring to the king as "our sovereign lord," claiming it was sacrilegious.¹⁹

While incarcerated in Newgate, the intensity of Brothers' apocalyptic visions increased. Through his visions he realized why Satan was stalking the streets of London: "she is called Sodom, . . . spiritually called Babylon the Great."²⁰ For Brothers, this also explained why London's "street are full of vice, and her prisons are full of oppression."²¹

Shortly after Brothers' release from prison in November 1792, he grew dispirited about his mission as a prophet. He set out on foot to leave London, hoping this would end his career as prophet. As he approached the sixteenth mile on his journey to Bristol, he threw his rod (that he carried to emulate Moses) away in anger.²² But nine miles later into his journey, "God by his power stopped the action of every joint and limb, and turned me feelingly round with more ease than a strong man would a young child, commanding me, at the same instant, to return and wait his proper time."²³ On his return to London, he "was forcibly led" to the "exact spot" where he abandoned his rod "and made [to] take it up."²⁴ By the time Brothers arrived back in London late in the evening "he now knew that from his prophetic call, symbolized by the rod, there was no escape."²⁵

Brothers then moved into a new lodging on Paddington Street and lost himself in interpreting his visions and dreams. He became convinced "that he was no ordinary prophet, but was the Prince of the Hebrews and nephew of the Almighty--for his surname of Brothers denoted that he was descended from King David through James, one of the brothers of Jesus."²⁶ His mission was to lead the Jews "from all Nations [back] to the LAND OF ISRAEL . . . in a similar manner to Moses in Egypt, but with additional power."²⁷ He started writing down his visions for the residents of London and inhabitants of the world. In 1794, Brothers published A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times, Book the First. This work was followed shortly after by Book the Second. Prior to the publication of A Revealed Knowledge, Brothers attracted little attention. But his work sold quickly in England, and reprints published in Ireland, France, and America spread his prophecies beyond the kingdom. Other pamphlets written by the prophet followed, including An Exposition of the Trinity and A Description of Jerusalem. Dozens of testimonial were also printed defending and attacking his prophetic claims. As a parade of curious people invaded his apartment, literary critics started discussing his prophecies in their articles. Even the London Times referred to Brothers as "the Great Prophet of Paddington Street."²⁸

The central themes of Brothers' prophecies appear in his A Revealed Knowledge. The two-part work consists of numerous excerpts from the Bible interspersed with Brothers' commentary, passages describing his visions, and references about his authority as a prophet. The work, according to Harrison, covers "the usual millennial mixture from the scriptures: the great passages from Isaiah about the coming messiah; the prophecies of Daniel; Jesus' promises in the gospels; the apocalyptic passages in John's gospel; and the Book of Revelation."²⁹ Harrison further notes that "none of this was very original: it would have been perfectly familiar to regular church- or chapel-goers" of the late eighteenth century.³⁰ For instance, like other Protestant millenarians of the period, Brothers identified the great whore of Revelation 17 as Rome, the scarlet-colored beast as the pope, and the ten horns as the cardinals.³¹ He also

offered his own calculations about premillennial events, including his prediction that the Jews would return to Jerusalem in 1798.³² More unusual was his theory regarding the identity of the lost tribes of Israel. He identified them as "invisible" Jews as distinguished from "the visible Jews."³³ In another work, An Exposition of the Trinity, Brothers elaborated on his theory regarding the lost tribes, claiming they were "concealed among the Gentiles" and living in "this far northern part of the globe," meaning Britain.³⁴ It is for this reason that historians have named Brothers as the father of British Israelism, the precursor of the contemporary Christian Identity movement.³⁵

Brothers' career as a prophet was short-lived. He came under suspicion by the government because of the political overtones associated with some of his prophecies. As noted earlier, he opposed the government's policy against the French Revolution. This fostered "the impression . . . that Brothers and his followers were dupes of the French revolutionaries."³⁶ In his A Revealed Knowledge, Brothers also branded Parliament with "the number of 666," the mark of the Beast.³⁷ Worst yet, the prophet challenged the authority of George III, declaring that his "crown must be delivered up to me, that all your power and authority many instantly cease."³⁸ Ultimately, the political mood of the period prompted the crown to view Brothers' prophecies as a plot against the government. As a result, the prophet of Paddington Street was charged with treason and brought before the Privy Council in March 1795. As the council's inquest ensued, his accusers "found insufficient evidence to substantiate the charge and decided . . . to proceed on medical rather than political grounds."³⁹ They declared Brothers insane and committed him to a private asylum where he remained eleven years, from 1795 to 1806.⁴⁰ Although Brothers' incarceration halted the publicity which brought him under the suspicion of the Pitt administration, it did little to reduce his charisma as a prophet among many millenarians. Indeed, it intensified their faith in Brothers' prophecies and his credentials as a prophet who would be persecuted like Christ and the prophets of the Old Testament.⁴¹ Until the appearance of Joanna Southcott in 1801 as a new prophet, "Brothers remained the central figure" among millenarians.⁴²

The Concept of Charisma

Richard Brothers' prophetic claims garnered the support of many loyal disciples and followers and thus signaled his rise as a charismatic figure. In order to examine the sources and extents of his charismatic influence, this inquiry looks to the previous literature on charisma. The eminent sociologist Max Weber describes the illusive concept of charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which [an individual] is set apart from ordinary [people] and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional qualities."⁴³ The research of Weber and other scholars is explicated in this section in regard to the dimensions of charisma. Four main aspects of charisma become apparent in regard to scholarly investigations on the concept of charisma: the situation one occupies, one's personal traits, the characteristics of one's message, and the particulars of one's audience. All of these factors have been discussed in the literature on charisma. In order to bring further scholarly precision, inquiries on apocalyptic rhetoric will be used to supplement and hone the section concerning message characteristics.

The Situation and Charisma

An analysis of the situation is critical when investigating a charismatic figure. Indeed, Lewis argues, "Charisma is not an innate quality that surfaces regardless of political, social, or religious climate."⁴⁴ During periods of "rapid social change and immediate social crisis," Lewis explains, "the stage may be set for the emergence of the charismatic communicator."⁴⁵ In support of this observation, Boss provides the examples of "Gandhi, Nasser, Roosevelt, and Christ" who fell "into prominence during periods of economic and social agitation and distress."⁴⁶

Obviously, an analysis of the situation itself is incomplete unless one examines the impact of the situation on the lives of the potential followers of prophets. Indeed, Lewis notes, "If audience members believe that their immediate context is hopeless, stress-producing, or threatening, their scope of perception narrows until they locate a leader/communicator who can remedy their exigence."⁴⁷ Stoda and Dionisopoulos concur with importance placed

on the interaction between situation and audience. They explain that the "words of the prophet are called for during times of perceived crisis when," as Overholt notes, "humans feel most vulnerable, least in control and more in need of explanations that will make sense of a seemingly chaotic world."⁴⁸ Weber's investigation of charisma also implies the link between the situation and the audience, for he notes that the "'recognition'" of a charismatic figure "is a matter of complete personal devotion arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope."⁴⁹

Personal Traits and Charisma

In addition to an analysis of the situation, the literature on charisma isolates many personal traits salient for investigating the supernatural power of prophets. Boss offers a starting point for exploring these traits by noting that "a prime attribute of charisma has been designated in the literature as the 'gift of grace.'"⁵⁰ From "the Judeo-Christian tradition," this gift is frequently associated with the ability to heal the sick, "miraculous powers," and "the gift of prophecy."⁵¹ In addition, the "gift of grace" exhibits itself in those who "can put the deepest knowledge into words" through "power of the [Holy] Spirit."⁵² Boss explains that those perceived as possessing the "divine gift" are invested with an aura of credibility which is "wider than either the concepts of 'good will' or 'trustworthiness.'"⁵³ This is particularly evident "when an individual believes he [or she] has been chosen by some divine entity for a special mission and projects a conviction of messianic destiny."⁵⁴ In these cases, according to Boss, the individual "extends his [or her] *ethos* beyond the ordinary standard" into "a form of spiritual energy" by projecting "enhanced qualification," "personal dynamism," and "safety."⁵⁵

In probing more deeply into how the prophet exudes this peculiar type of *ethos* to a group of followers it seems that conviction is a powerful factor. Weber provides the example of Jesus in explaining the phenomenon.

[T]he entire basis of Jesus' own legitimation, as well as his claim that he and only he knew the Father and that the way to God led through faith in him alone, was the magical charisma he felt

within himself. It was doubtless this consciousness of power, more than anything else, that enabled him to traverse the road of the prophets.⁵⁶

Thus, the projection of overpowering conviction in one's mission and call is an attribute required of the prophet.

Another intriguing personal attribute of charisma identified by Lewis is the notion of "the stranger."⁵⁷ Simply put, part of the intrigue of charismatic people is that they are different. According to Weber, "In order to do justice to their mission, the holders of charisma . . . must stand outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations, as well as outside the routine obligations of family life."⁵⁸ This sets charismatic figures apart from others, reinforces the perception of their commitment to their mission, and fosters what Weber calls "the genuine mentality of the prophet."⁵⁹

Darsey's observations concerning the prophet's "loss of self, particularly self conceived as a rational calculating faculty,"⁶⁰ adds another dimension to Lewis' description of "the stranger." Specifically, he notes that "the prophetic commission is one of service" and focuses on "indebtedness to the gift."⁶¹ This requires the "effacement of the self" on the part of the prophet, an act which casts the prophet in the role of the martyr.⁶² By taking on this role, a prophet commits "the perfect irrational act" yet "[reflects] the nature of charisma."⁶³

One other personal attribute of charismatic figures identified by Lewis is known as the "miracle worker."⁶⁴ This attribute emerges from the fact that "'successful results,'" especially those regarded as "miraculous," are required for "the generating of charisma."⁶⁵ Lewis indicates that "'miracles' can be unpredictable events (e.g., 'healings' at a tent-service) or rhetorical claims (e.g., some healers claim that followers will receive 'ten-fold returns' if they will give all of their money to a specific ministry)."⁶⁶ Weber likewise associates the performance of "miracles" to those aspiring "to be a prophet."⁶⁷ This is a part of what Weber calls "charismatic authentication," providing "proof" of the prophet's "possession of particular gifts of the spirit, of special magical or ecstatic abilities."⁶⁸

The Message and Charisma

According to Boss, "The message of the charismatic leader will contain what are seen as compelling verbal and nonverbal components."⁶⁹ Some of the verbal components associated with charismatic individuals include the advocacy of a visionary agenda, the incorporation of appeals linked to the fears and hopes of potential followers, the employment of polarizing tactics, the use and creation of myths, and other verbal strategies designed to bolster the authority of would-be prophets. Coincidentally, many of these rhetorical features are also commonly associated with apocalyptic discourse. This is no accident because, as Brummett notes, "Apocalyptic movements often culster around a prophet who guides the interpreting of the signs and serves as the magnet around which the community of the elect will draw."⁷⁰

Boss observes that the charismatic leader must advocate what he calls an "idealistic crusade."⁷¹ This crusade or visionary agenda derives its potency when it "relates to some sociopolitical perdicament that cries out for urgent resolution."⁷² Lewis recognizes the importance of the same principle but uses a different term, "a message of revolution," when describing the rhetoric of charismatic figures.⁷³ Such rhetoric, he notes, "does not necessarily mean an ideology of violence or extreme departure from the status quo but rather a change from the present stress, an alterative to the current crisis."⁷⁴

Literature on apocalyptic rhetoric emphasizes the notion of a response to crisis as a general feature of such discourse. Indeed, research indicates that an important function of this type of discourse is to provide meaning to the audience's experiences of social instability. As Brummett notes, "Apocalyptic is always a response to meaninglessness, failure of points of reference, and bewilderment about how to understand the present."⁷⁵

Charismatic figures, particularly those who claim the gift of prophecy, assume "the voice" of higher authority by declaring they speak "a conception of inerrant truth."⁷⁶ According to Stoda and Dionisopoulos, "this uncompromising commitment to revealed truth dictates" the use of "harsh words" combined with the use of "a hopeful message as well."⁷⁷ Heschel expresses

the same idea, nothing that "almost every prophet. . . begins with a message of doom" and concludes "with a message of hope."⁷⁸ This rhetorical tactic engages the audience in a drama involving their worst fears about the present crisis and their hopes for a better future.

A similar rhetorical pattern has emerged from the study of apocalyptic discourse. Such rhetoric, according to Brummett, always decries the present state of sin and evil in society, predicts an immediate apocalypse, and foresees a hopeful millennium.⁷⁹ This type of rhetoric helps to reduce the meaninglessness and uncertainty associated with current events by constructing them as part of "the Great Plan."⁸⁰ Through this rhetorical construction, "people . . . gain symbolic control over their difficulties," providing them with a way of turning the unpredictable into the predictable.⁸¹

The rhetorical tactic of polarization has also been associated with charismatic individuals. Indeed, Lewis observes that "charismatic leaders frequently sharpen and intensify their followers' constricted perspectives by the use of polarized aggression."⁸² The tactic not only establishes "the charismatic leader" as "an active 'fighter,'" but also "sets [him or her] at an opposite ideological position from an 'enemy.'"⁸³ Among charismatic evangelists, Lewis notes that Satan is often identified as a "personal adversary and his demons as the indwelling causes of all handicaps and diseases."⁸⁴

Polarizing rhetorical strategies have emerged from an examination of apocalyptic discourse as well. Brummett indicates,

Apocalyptic pictures the world in bipolar terms as a dramatic conflict between good and evil. . . . Bipolar dramatization, by giving them [the audience] no middle ground, enlists the audience on the side of good. Since the apocalypse will settle the struggle favorably for the good and disastrously for the evil, it is by way of group membership that people's fates will be determined.⁸⁵

The employment of this polarized view of the world allows the rhetor to define the role of his or her followers in the unfolding drama of the apocalypse.

Through this rhetorical strategy, the rhetor's followers gain meaning about their lives, secure their place in history, and learn how their actions fit into the scheme of the unfolding drama.

Polarization serves another purpose for prophets, particularly for those who are derided or labeled insane. As O'Leary explains, "The characterization of one's interlocutors as servants of the devil (wittingly or unwittingly) is a useful device for those who seek an explanation of their own persuasive failure, one with obviously chilling effects on the practice of argument."⁸⁶ Thus, accusers and unbelievers are simply a known part of revealed prophecy; they merely become necessary antagonists in the drama of this apocalypse. Zulick extends this line of analysis, pointing out that personal failures of the prophet can further bolster his or her "prophetic ethos."⁸⁷ The very act of being a prophet of the apocalypse allows the rhetor enviable ground in relation to his or her message; "If you believe, this is a sign of the End. If you do not believe me, that too is a sign of the End. The telling of it and the reception of it (whether positive or negative) are proof of it [the apocalyptic prediction]."⁸⁸

Another feature associated with the discourse of charismatic figures is the use of myth. An aspiring "charismatic leader," according to Willner and Willner, attempts to "legitimize his [or her] claim to a position of authority" by "[drawing] upon and [manipulating] the body of myth in a given culture and the actions and values associated with those myths."⁸⁹ Lewis also points out that "once the symbolizer is accepted by the adoring crowd, the person has the capacity to establish new 'myths' for followers to believe and accept."⁹⁰ He further notes, "As espoused by the capable charismatic leader, myth provides an on-going effective means for establishing oneness with an audience."⁹¹

Brummett's analysis of apocalyptic discourse reveals a similar reliance on a body of myth for bolstering the credibility of the rhetor or prophet. For instance, he indicates that prophets of the apocalypse "borrow the prestige of biblical sources" in order to interpret both the revelations and the signs of the times.⁹² These sources and the stories they tell stimulate the imagination and memory of the audience and thus function like myth. They also increase the

credibility of prophets by showing how their interpretations of modern signs are consistent with biblical sources.

The Audience and Charisma

As noted in the discussion of the situation, an analysis of charisma is incomplete without examining the audience of a charismatic figure. In fact, Boss observes that recognition of a charismatic individual requires a group of "idoltrous followers" and potential followers.⁹³ Some sociologists such as Gerth argue that it is less important to focus on the "charismatic qualities" of the leader because the most "relevant" factor hinges on whether a "sufficient" number of "followers . . . believe" in the charismatic "qualities" of the leader and "acknowledge his [or her] claim for recognition."⁹⁴ Lewis emphasizes this point as well. In particular, he argues, "The charismatic leader is the creation of his or her followers (i.e., a leader only has charisma if listeners recognize the person as having charisma)."⁹⁵ Weber's discussion of charisma likewise stresses the idea that the determination of the "charismatic claim" of a leader rests with the audience and not with the leader. Indeed, he argues that only audience can decide whether a person deserves "[recognition] as their charismatically qualified leader."⁹⁶

In describing "idoltrous followers," Boss notes that "these individuals are faithful listeners, responders, and doers."⁹⁷ Moreover, he argues that the "success" of a charismatic leader depends upon whether he or she attracts a "following of devoted apostles who help propagandize 'the chosen one' and his [or her] purpose."⁹⁸ Boss also emphasizes the role of media as "surrogate 'disciples'" because it can "[make] potential . . . leaders visible to an incredibly large audience."⁹⁹

The dynamic relationship between the charismatic individual and his or her followers creates a unique rhetorical bond between them. This bond, according to Boss, "makes individuals more susceptible to a leader's message of alluring change."¹⁰⁰ The "special predisposition toward belief" can foster "an inordinate 'sense of community'" between the "follower and the charismatic leader-communicator."¹⁰¹ Lewis further proposes that followers "[re-

linquish]" their "individual identity" and "take on the collective identity . . . informed by the perceived nature of the leader."¹⁰²

Undergirding the special relationship between the charismatic leader and the follower are unique social, psychological, and rhetorical factors which bind the former to the latter. Lewis explains part of the phenomenon among those who seek out a "savior" for their problems as follows: "In a religious context, certain groups of devout followers may converge because they have been unable to resolve feelings of estrangement and fatality in other normal, traditional contexts."¹⁰³ He add, "It is as if audience members 'look' through the filter of social crisis and 'find' the leader/communicator with the traits necessary to receive their adoration."¹⁰⁴ They seek out "a leader with a 'messianic destiny'" for resolving "the frustrations and stress of their situational crises."¹⁰⁵ Further contributing to the attraction between the followers and the leader is the attribute of strangeness on the part of the leader. As Lewis notes, "Potential followers 'aggrandize and exoticize'" the "attribute" of "stranger" associated with a charismatic figure "and add their own attributed aura to the [leader's] personality."¹⁰⁶ A similar process operates between the follower and the leader regarding the message of the latter. Specifically, Lewis explains, "As the audience increasingly and more strongly identifies with the leader who promotes myth, fervor and loyalty intensity."¹⁰⁷

Analysis of Brothers' Charisma as a Prophet

With the preceeding discussion of the four major factors of charisma in mind, this section examines the charisma of Brothers through an analysis of these factors. Specifically, the inquiry focuses on the prophet's charisma as a function of the situation, his personal traits, his message traits, and the state of mind of his audience.

The Situation

The literature on charisma indicates that an analysis of the situation is required to understand the dynamics involved in the emergence of a prophet. The situation and its impact on the lives of followers must also be considered

when investigating this phenomenon. In the case of Brothers, it is useful to examine the socio-historical climate in England during the 1790s.

When Richard Brothers published his A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times, the time was ripe for a charismatic prophet to arrive on the scene in Britain. During the period, anxiety and uncertainty over the French Revolution spurred a new wave of anticipation among millenarians in England. They viewed the turbulent events on the continent of Europe as sure signs of the impending apocalypse.¹⁰⁸ As the 1790s unfolded, students of prophecy witnessed the fall of the French monarchy, the guillotining of Louis XIV, the invasion of Poland by Russia and Prussia, the French declaration of war against Britain and Spain, the termination of papal power in France, the Reign of Terror, the execution of Robespierre, the death of King Louis XVII, the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte marching across Europe, and the French assault against Rome that forced the pope into exile. Millenarians in Britain viewed many of these events as the fulfillment of prophecies from the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation.¹⁰⁹ In looking back on the climate of the times, Garrett observed, "events and prophecy had combined to produce a confusing situation for English millenarians."¹¹⁰

Another situational factor which contributed to the rise of Brothers as a charismatic prophet dealt with the spiritual environment of London itself. During the late eighteenth century, London was a magnet for students of the occult, mesmerism, mysticism, and other forms of spiritual enlightenment.¹¹¹ Among the spiritual movements of the times that contributed to millenarian apprehension prior to the French Revolution was the theosophical teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, a visionary from Sweden who died in London in 1772.¹¹² In 1787, a band of the visionary's disciples organized the New Jerusalem Church in London.¹¹³ Although Swedenborg's ideas were different from most students of prophecy in England, "some millenarians," according to Harrison, regarded him as "the prophet who . . . announced the millennium in a spiritual sense."¹¹⁴ As will be seen latter in this analysis, there were im-

portant connections between the followers of Swedenberg and the followers of Brothers.

Further contributing to the spiritual climate of London during the late eighteenth century were an assortment of amusing eccentrics and pretender prophets. A woman called the "Rabbit Woman" caused a stir over her claim that she could give birth to rabbits. A crazed soldier known as the "Life Guard Man" produced a hubbub over his prediction that a powerful trembler would demolish London.¹¹⁵ Other fanatics who worked as magnetic healers gained a following among those living in London's workhouses. One acclaimed magnetic healer of the 1780s was Samuel Best, who was more widely known as "Poor-Helps." While living at London's Shoreditch workhouse, he earned a reputation for his ability as a practitioner of palmistry. His routine involved giving his callers a survey of their past and future while reciting passages from the Bible. Best also diagnosed his client's medical maladies by licking their palms. Scores of London's residents, including members of the upper class, asked Poor-Helps to lick their palms. In 1795, when Richard Brothers was confined to an asylum, Best tried to assume Brothers' role as the prophet of the end-time. He started calling himself the leader of the Jews and declared that he would rebuild Jerusalem in preparation for the millennium.¹¹⁶

Personal Traits

Previous research suggests that charisma is related to the personality of the rhetor. The powerful personality of Richard Brothers, the Nephew of the Almighty, shines through his prophetic works. This section extracts indices of Brothers' personality from both parts of his work, A Revealed Knowledge and Prophecies of the Times. Three charismatic qualities of his personality emerge from his text: the projection of an overwhelming conviction of his prophetic ethos, his sanctified status as a prophet of God, and his ability to accomplish supernatural feats.

One important personal trait that emerges in his work is the projection of an overpowering conviction in his power and role. Weber, in his analysis of the Christ, noticed that this is a critical element of charisma, and Brothers

exhibits this throughout his text. For instance, Brothers confidently excuses his blatant rewriting of scripture through such statements as "The alterations I have made in copying some of the Prophecies is by the direction and command of the Lord God."¹¹⁷ Not only does he have the power and permission to edit scriptural edicts, he also exalts his position as the prophet of God. This powerful relationship with the Almighty is sanctified by his belief in his position as prophet. Indeed, Brothers boldly states, "All the Prophecies given in Visions from God are concealed from the knowledge of man by mysterious allusions until the proper time, and the appointed person for them to be revealed to."¹¹⁸ Of course, Brothers believes that he is this chosen prophet, as he says, "I am the PROPHET that will be revealed to the JEWS to order their departure from all Nations to go to the LAND OF ISRAEL, their own country, in a similar manner to Moses in Egypt, but with additional power."¹¹⁹ He admits that God has given him these powers because Brothers is the "VISIBLE GOVERNOR of the Jews."¹²⁰ Brothers is so convinced that divine authority authenticates his mission that he writes, "I shall, under God, rule all nations under the government of the Gospel."¹²¹ His textual advocacy also indicates that his reign should commence in England, thus leading him to demand the crown of George III.¹²² Brothers' personality is transmitted through his text as being quite convinced of his divine sanction and authority. He is the Prince of the Hebrews and the Nephew of the Almighty, the divinely-commissioned ruler of the world and the possessor of the ability to edit holy scripture.

Brothers also conveys his sanctified role as prophet through his text. He frequently indicates that God has commanded him to write these works and that God has determined the date of publication.¹²³ His role seems biblically based when he quotes passages from scripture and parenthetically adds himself to the mythic narrative. For instance, in quoting from the Book of Isaiah, he writes, "And in that day there shall be a ROOT OF JESSE (meaning myself) which shall stand for a SIGN to the People (meaning the Jews), to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his REST (meaning his Government at Jerusalem) shall be glorious."¹²⁴ Elsewhere in his work, Brothers consecrates himself as the final

prophet of divine origin, indicating, "I am the appointed witness for God, and his last recorded prophet to warn all nations."¹²⁵ Thus, Brothers' personality is shaped through these textual traces of his own belief in his sanctified role as prophet to God; God assists him in writing his work and anoints Brothers to the position of last recorded prophet of revealed knowledge.

Brothers' charisma is further enhanced by his rhetorical display of his miraculous powers. For instance, Brothers says that it was his pleading that saved the city of London from the preordained judgment (destruction) at the hands of God. Specifically, he indicates, "The LORD GOD was so exceedingly angry at the time of the loud thunder . . . that he determined to . . . burn her [London] immediately with fire from Heaven."¹²⁶ Brothers then notes that he pleaded for the safety of London, and miraculously, God acquiesces. Through his text, God announces, "I PARDON LONDON AND ALL THE PEOPLE IN IT" because only Brothers "COULD STAND BEFORE ME TO ASK FOR SO GREAT A THING!"¹²⁷ Brothers thus portrays himself as being able to affect great miracles, even up to the point of convincing God to change his schedule of judgment. The Nephew of the Almighty also uses his power of "the gift" for prophecy of current events. Brothers states (*ex post facto*) in his Book the Second of A Revealed Knowledge, which was published in 1795, "As I knew, in the beginning of 1792, that the King of England would enter into this war [against France]."¹²⁸ Other prophecies which Brothers offers as evidence of his authenticity as a prophet include the death of Louis XVI ("to fulfill the predetermined judgment of God by this prophet") and the abolition of the French monarchy ("by the same judgment").¹²⁹ These rhetorical displays construct Brothers in a very powerful manner, invoking his ability to work miracles in relation to God's foreordained destruction of London and in regard to foreseeing significant current events.

Message Traits

Both the literature on charisma in general and apocalyptic discourse in particular indicate that certain parts of the message can be used to increase the perceived charisma that a prophet has in relation to his or her followers. In

A Revealed Knowledge, Brothers clearly uses many of these strategies to place him in a desirable position in the eyes of his adherents. His messages provide a sense of meaning for the audience, appeal to senses of doom and hope, use polarization, and rely on myth to bolster his charismatic position.

Keeping in mind the dire socio-historical context of the period, it can be said that Brothers' message provides meaning for his followers. He tells his adherents that the confusing events unfolding in Europe are the result of the judgment of God. Specifically, Brothers declares that "the death of Louis the Sixteenth" as well as "the revolution in France and its consequences proceeded entirely from the judgment of God to [fulfill] the prophecy of Daniel."¹³⁰ This explanation provides meaning for his audience by framing events within the context of fulfilled prophecy. Moreover, Brothers informs his audience that "many nations" have been brought "under the judgment of God" because of their "heavy guilt of opposing his decrees."¹³¹ In providing this explanation, Brothers reinforces the long-held Christian belief that opposing God results in dire consequences. Thus constructed, the audience now understands why the world is in the midst of the apocalypse.

Brothers' message also incorporates appeals to the audience's senses of doom and hope. He heightens the audience's sense of impending doom. For instance, he interprets an apocalyptic verse from the prophet Haggai as "The Time alluded to by the Prophet is that which is immediately before the restoration of the Jews, in the latter days of the world: THE PRESENT IS IT."¹³² In his text, Brothers also emphasizes the immediacy of the apocalypse by offering prophecies about the very near future: "Believe me, the day of destruction to punish disobedience to the Gospel is so very nigh that it will take place before the commencement of eight months from this day."¹³³ Intermixed with these messages of apocalyptic doom are messages of millennial hope. Hope, in this case, lies with Brothers. His text bluntly points out that the evil people must experience "will take place . . . unless what I write is believed to be true and the advice I give is strictly followed."¹³⁴ Brothers offers further hope by telling his audience that they are the "invisible Jews," the chosen people of the Bible.

They are commanded to follow him back to the promised land (literally, the restoration of the Jews in Palestine) in anticipation of the return of Christ and the dawn of the millennium. At that time, Brothers assures his audience that "peace and great happiness . . . will be in the land of Israel when the Jews are restored."¹³⁵

Polizariation as a rhetorical tactic is also evident in Brothers' work. He portrays the current crisis and the coming struggle as one in which good faces off against evil. Brothers and his believers (the "invisible Jews") are the force on the side of good; unbelievers and warring nations are their opposition. As if to personify the seductive face of vice and evil that Brothers says is plaguing the world, he recounts a vision of Satan. In A Revealed Knowledge, Brothers tells his readers, "I . . . saw Satan walking leisurely into London: his face had a smile, but under it his looks were sly, crafty, and deceitful."¹³⁶ The audience is further drawn into this construction of evil in the world through Brothers' admonition that London's "streets are full of vice."¹³⁷ Moreover, he recounts another vision to his followers about the fate of London: "After this I was in a Vision and saw a LARGE RIVER run through London COLOURED WITH HUMAN BLOOD."¹³⁸ Through such rhetoric, the audience is forced to choose one side or the other in this epic of good versus evil. Brothers also indicates that evil exists in the world because of "the Pope and Cardinals."¹³⁹ They are "in a state of opposition to Christ" because they "encourage . . . SWEARING and WAR: the two principle things which Christ . . . prohibits in the most positive terms."¹⁴⁰ Thus, the lines are drawn in this prophet's message; the audience is now left to choose which side they follow.

Assisting the audience to believe in Brothers as the prophet of revealed knowledge is the use of myth in his message. As is the case with other apocalyptic writers who borrow the influence of sacred and respected resources in order to bolster their own credibility, Brothers follows this tactic by constantly connecting his power with narratives from the Bible. Initially, his glosses and "quotations" from biblical sources are often tainted by his interpretations. As noted earlier, he alters scripture when God tells him to and he parenthetically

inserts modern events (thunder, wars) and himself into biblical verses. Like the prophets of ancient times, he explicitly claims that he is in direct contact with God. Brothers connects his lineage with the biblical Jews, writing, "It is FIFTEEN HUNDRED YEARS since my Family was separated from the Jews, and lost all knowledge of its origin."¹⁴¹ God, however, has recently revealed this knowledge to Brothers through extraordinary means. He indicates that these unorthodox events, since they are similar to events experienced by the prophets of biblical times, verify that he is truly inspired by God. For instance, he writes, "A KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCRIPTURES, and Prophecies I have mentioned, and all that I have wrote besides, have been communicated to me through VISIONS and REVELATIONS from the Lord God; the PROPHET DANIEL and ST. JOHN THE APOSTLE were instructed in the same manner to write what they have."¹⁴² Brothers also says he has, "similar to the Prophet Daniel at Babylon, an attending Angel to explain all the Visions."¹⁴³ For these reasons, Brothers constructs himself as a credible prophet due to his similarity to the sacred prophets of the Bible.

Brothers' use of myths and narratives from the Bible also affords him a way to maintain his prophetic ethos when confronted with apathy from non-believers and skepticism from critics. Like the Old Testament prophets who were shunned by the Israelites when they warned the people of God's wrath, Brothers claims that God counseled him that the people of London would not believe him.¹⁴⁴ He also defends himself from those who might brand him as a lunatic by comparing himself to Christ who was "reproached with having a devil, being mad, and out of his senses."¹⁴⁵ Thus, his message connects his mission to the mythical experiences of God's prophets and Christ. In doing so, his message gains a powerful defense against audience apathy and dismissal. Indeed, if the sacred prophets were ignored by the Israelites and if Christ was maligned as being insane, Brothers' audience can be lead to believe that he too is an abused prophet. The Prince of the Hebrews further anticipates his detractors, writing that he will "be despised and made [to] suffer."¹⁴⁶ Not only does Brothers foresee this reaction, he also attempts to combat it through fear

appeals. He claims that God forewarned him, "When you write hereafter of things in this country, you will be called an imposter, a fool, and a liar; you will be imprisoned and treated very ill. When I see this, it will make me very angry; I will then begin to kill the people and I will destroy this city."¹⁴⁷ Thus, Brothers pictures God as waiting to punish those who reject his mission.

The Audience

The literature on the audience and charisma emphasizes that one who aspires to become prophet requires a band of devoted followers who testify to charismatic claims of the prophet. This section examines some of Brothers' followers and identifies the unique social, psychological, and rhetorical factors which bound them to the Prince of the Hebrews.

Brothers' most distinguished disciple was Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, an oriental scholar and member of Parliament.¹⁴⁸ After visiting Brothers and reading his books, Halhed tried to address the House of Commons about the prophet's views regarding a motion for negotiating with the French. Failing in his attempt to be recognized by the speaker of the House, Halhed published The Whole Testimonies of the Authenticity of the Prophecies and Mission of Richard Brothers.¹⁴⁹ In his pamphlet, the M.P. revealed that his abhorance of war and interest in biblical prophecy were the primary factors in his devotion to Brothers.¹⁵⁰ When Brothers was arrested for treason in March 1795, Halhed raised the issue on two occasions before the Commons. In addition, he issued another pamphlet, A Calculation on the Commencement of the Millennium, in defense of the prophet's revealed knowledge.¹⁵¹ In this pamphlet, curiosity about the millennium and Brothers' prediction of its commencement emerge as Halhed's major themes.¹⁵²

George Coggan, a merchant from Hull, appears to have been attracted to Brothers for reasons similar to Halhed's. Events associated with the French Revolution, his opposition to the British government's policy toward France, and his belief in Brothers' ability to interpret prophecies from the Bible played a role in Coggan's decision that the prophet was God's messenger of the end-

time. These themes were addressed in his pamphlet, A Testimony of Richard Brothers in an Epistolary Address to the People of England.¹⁵³

Pamphlets issued by other disciples of Brothers indicate that concerns with the crisis in France and an interest in the millennium were not the only factors which accounted for Brothers' charisma as a prophet. Two of Brothers' followers, John Wright, a carpenter from Leeds, and William Bryan, a copperplate printer, were seekers of religious truth who studied mysticism and the occult at the Avignon Lodge in France before announcing their allegiance to Brothers.¹⁵⁴ In the case of Wright, Brothers' "spiritual discernment" and the anticipation of a prophet who would fulfill the prophecy of Christopher Love, a Puritan who had been executed in 1651, factored into his belief that Brothers was the one "whom MOSES and the Prophets, and John in the Revelations, spoke of as the true representative of JESUS CHRIST."¹⁵⁵ For Bryan, his belief in "divine communications" and the memory of "a dream" about "the New Jerusalem" led him to the conclusion that "RICHARD BROTHERS" was "the man appointed of the Lord to declare his judgements."¹⁵⁶

Other disciples of the prophet of Paddington Street were students of the visionary ideas of Swedenborg before they became followers of Brothers. Two of these disciples were Philip de Loutherbourg, a celebrated landscape painter and member of the Royal Academy, and William Sharp, an engraver of some repute.¹⁵⁷ Loutherbourg dabbled in alchemy, was a founding member of the Theosophical Society, and worked as a faith healer before he became attracted to Brothers.¹⁵⁸ Sharp was a member of London's New Jerusalem Church and probably a mesmerist. In 1794, the government investigated his activities in the radical republican movement.¹⁵⁹ One year later, after studying Brothers' works, Sharp published an engraving of "Richard Brothers, Prince of the Hebrews," with an inscription that read, "Fully believing this to be the MAN whom GOD has appointed, I engrace his likeness."¹⁶⁰

Concerns over the godless state of society in general also contributed to the rise of Brothers' as a prophet. Henry Offley, who contributed a pamphlet entitled Richard Brothers, Neither a Madman nor an Imposter, was troubled

by the abuses of the slave trade.¹⁶¹ Thomas Taylor condemned "the idleness and luxury of the nobility," the "short-changing and monopolizing of merchants and tradesmen, and the bull-baiting, dancing and cock-fighting of the populace" in his pamphlet, An Additional Testimony Given to Vindicate the Truth of the Prophecies of Richard Brothers.¹⁶²

For some of Brothers' followers it appears that his mannerisms as a "stranger" contributed to their belief in his prophetic powers. This seems to be the case with the prophet's former landlady, Mrs. Green. As noted earlier, she observed Brothers going without food for three days after having a vision of London's destruction. Moreover, she found it most peculiar that Brothers rarely left her house.¹⁶³ Evidently, these strange mannerisms impressed her deeply. She wrote in her testimonial, A Letter to the Publisher of Brothers's Prophecies, that Brothers appeared in her dreams. In one of her dreams, she heard a voice telling her, "'How do you know, but He is John the Baptist.'" ¹⁶⁴ Henry Offley likewise made note of Brothers' mannerisms. He remarked in his pamphlet that there was "'something . . . so awful in his countenance.'" ¹⁶⁵

The testimonials of Brothers' followers provide clues about the factors of charisma which may have contributed to his appeal as a prophet. Clearly, the chaos associated with the revolution in France laid the foundation for the emergence of a prophet who could provide a sense of meaning for those seeking a religious explanation for the turmoil of the times. Features of Brothers' personality, his mannerisms, and his claims that he could accomplish supernatural feats undoubtedly fostered the perception among those who dabbled in mystical experiences that he exemplified exceptional qualities associated with being a prophet of God. Among millenarians anticipating the apocalypse and the dawn of the millennium, Brothers' messages of doom and hope probably struck a responsive chord. It is also likely that the incarceration of Brothers by the government made him a martyr in the eyes of many of his followers.

Observations of Charisma as a Rhetorical Construct

The analysis of the career of Richard Brothers as a prophet provides insight into the dynamics of charisma as a rhetorical construct. First, charisma

is the result of a complex interaction between situation, personality, message, and audience. In Brothers' case, the uncertainty associated with the decade of the 1790s, his personal ethos as a prophet, his prophecies of doom and hope, and his audience's recognition of his prophetic powers allowed him to don the mantle of the prophet and prince of the Hebrews.

Second, the emergence of a charismatic individual absolutely requires a band of devoted followers. In this case study, it is evident that Brothers' band of disciples were responsible for his rise as a prophet. They issued pamphlets testifying to their belief in his prophetic prowess. Halhed's role in spreading Brothers' prophecies also provided the prophet with an aura of credibility that extended beyond testimonies offered by other followers of Brothers. Thus, a case can be made for viewing charisma as something that lies in the eyes of the beholder. The success of a prophet depends on whether he or she is able to garner the support of followers. More importantly for the extension of the theory of charisma, a case can be made for recognizing the transfer of ethos to a prophet from followers who occupy positions of power and authority. This is certainly evident in the case of Halhed. His credibility as a member of the House of Commons helped to legitimize Brothers' claim as a prophet.

A final extension to the theory of charisma which can be made in light of this inquiry deals with the significance of situation in relation to charisam. Brothers' texts highlight the point that the message of the charismatic leader must ride a fine line. On one hand, a prophet must not make his or her work so "timeless" that the audience sees no relevance in it. A prophet must also resist the impulse to deal with problems of the day so intensely that his or her charisma evaporates when those issues are no longer salient. In the case of Brothers, part of his immense situational charisma can be explained by his emphasis on the problems of the present; he relevantly links war, rulers, and nations of his day to biblical prophecy. There are costs to this tactic, however, in terms of residual charisma; Brothers' followers began to dry up within his own lifetime. Another prophet, Joanna Southcott, supplanted his role as the prophet of the end-time, and current attention to Brothers is purely scholarly.

From this reading of Brothers, rhetorical critics are well advised to consider the dilemma that confronts charismatic prophets; can they offer enough relevance through their message to secure support and adoration (i.e., charisma) in their day, yet retain a timeless message that will continue to draw people to them when the times have changed and they have passed away? Brothers definitely nurtured his "immediate charisma," garnering a large following in the actual day of his message, but lacked the rhetorical power to have much "residual charisma," support and adoration after the originating time of his message passed.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁵¹ Harrison, 64; Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, A Calculation on the Commencement of the Millennium (London: 1795).
- ¹⁵² Halhed, A Calculation on the Commencement of the Millennium, 10, 12.
- ¹⁵³ Harrison, 67, 68, 242 fn. 19.
- ¹⁵⁴ Harrison, 69, 70.
- ¹⁵⁵ John Wright, A Revealed Knowledge of Some Things that Will Speedily Be Fulfilled in the World (London: 1794), 23; Harrison, 71.
- ¹⁵⁶ William Bryan, A Testimony of the Spirit of Truth, Concerning Richard Brothers (London: 1795), 2, 3, 20.
- ¹⁵⁷ Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. "Louthborough, Philip James"; Harrison, 74.
- ¹⁵⁸ Garrett, 155.
- ¹⁵⁹ Harrison, 74, 74.

¹⁶⁰ Harrison, 74.

¹⁶¹ Harrison, 68, 241 fn. 17.

¹⁶² Harrison, 68, 241 fn. 20.

¹⁶³ Garrett, 180.

¹⁶⁴ Garrett, 201.

¹⁶⁵ Garrett, 200-1.